

# THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF

## XI.—The Yellow Jacket

"YES, it is practically the same old three-card monte game that we used to play on the sands at Coney Island when we were boys," said Doctor Upham of the American Hospital at Niungpo, to his friend, Doctor Forbes of Philadelphia, as they stood on the distant bridge at Shanghai and watched a native juggler entertaining the passers-by. "You see he has three bowls and a little ball of toasted rice which he passes from one to the other. Now you see it and now you don't, as they say, and the trick is to guess just which bowl it is under—and, as usual, though he places it there right under their eyes, the man in the crowd that bets on the sure thing generally gets it wrong."

"Why, that's nothing but the old 'thimble-rig' that they used to play on the tourists when I was a student in Edinburgh," answered the famous American surgeon. The man used to have three thimbles on a board and a little green pea which he rolled around until it got under one of them and then you had to guess which one it was under. You don't mean to tell me that they got that same old trick out here in China—I suppose the trick is up from some foreigner in one of the ports, they seem to catch on to our bad ways even faster than they do to our good ones."

"Not at all, the Chinese had that for years—I might even say centuries—before we ever dreamed of it. If there is any such thing as one nation learning from another, then surely we got it from them and not they from us, like a thousand other ingenious ways of humbugging people. Just consider—I could tell you about it if we had time, but I have rarely to believe that we don't get these things from each other, but it's a sort of general cunningness that's in our human nature and so it just crops out wherever we happen to be."

"Ah! I see, the little touch of nature that makes the whole world kin, eh?" "Tow or one of the little links of fellow-feeling that joins the West to the East—but just what this chap, I want to see how he does it, you'll find that there's a peculiar element in it here that you never saw at Coney Island in your boyhood days."

"And what's that, pray?" "You'll smile when I tell you, but it's religion!" "Good Heavens! Doctor, not religion in a three-card monte game?"

"The same—but I'll modify it a little for your benefit by calling it superstition. Now watch him."

The two surgeons stood in the midst of the curious but very good-natured crowd on the bridge while the juggler continued his trick. Dr. Upham's pocket was jostled with the local dialect enabling him to interpret the apparently meaningless jargon for his friend from abroad. "I see with great pleasure," he remarked, not dreaming that his words were understood, "that we have in this distinguished audience of mandarins and literary gentlemen, two famous visitors from across the ocean"—at this the crowd chuckled and laughed—"who have been recommended to this marvelous performance by His Excellency the Tao Tai, knowing that it is the most wonderful sight they could witness in all our ancient empire. My! How the crowds will gather around when these distant ocean-kingsdoms when they tell of what they have seen here today!" (More laughter from the crowd and a voice which cried, "Say! Ocean-Mandarin, do you have anything like this in your Honorable Kingdoms?" "Now I will roll the little rice-ball around until it goes under one of the bowls. Ah! There it is! Good-bye, little traveler, under some great and wise philosophy before me comes and finds you out! Twenty brass cash of the Ming Dynasty to the fortunate one—what! No bids? Thirty, forty, nay, I am bold and reckless today, fifty coins to the prince among you who overturns the right bowl!"

He paused and looked about him, took off his dilapidated hat, scratched the head that was beneath it and then tapped it several times with a rugged fan. No one being bold enough to come forward and speculate, he continued, "Ah! I know someone who is waiting to tell me just where that little rice-ball is. My little Poo Sak (idiot) knows, I'll just ask him, and running his hand up his right sleeve he drew out an old and battered image of a native divinity and held it up in both hands before him. "This is Poo Shen, the God of Wealth, who bestows his riches on all who implore him. I'll just pay my respects to him and then he will whisper his secret in my ear." Bowing low three times he rattled off a long string of unintelligible words to the wooden idol and then placed its lips close to his left ear and listened for a moment. "Ah! He says he knows—he never makes a mistake—it's under the middle one. Behold it!" He lifted up the center bowl with an elegant circular gesture of his arm and held it high in the air toward the gaze of the astonished spectators—there was absolutely nothing there! What! You lying rascal," he exclaimed, instantly

changing his voice and manner to the doctor. "Teach you not to deceive people that way? At the rice and wine cake and wine they've given you," and, to the infinite delight and amusement of the natives, but to the astonishment, horror and utter disgust of the foreigners, he deliberately boxed the ears of the little Poo Sak and returning it to the sleeve from which it came, said, "Go back up there and go to bed!"

Dr. Forbes could scarcely believe his senses. "Is this all the respect they have for their idols?" he asked of his companion. "It is just one of those peculiar little anomalies of the whole idolatry system. It is a curious blend of abject fear and ridicule. Sometimes when the skies are fair and everything is propitious, you will hear them speak in almost reverent tones of all their native gods and then, the first moment that trouble and disaster comes, they rush pell-mell to the temples and get down on their knees."

"Yes," answered the Mission surgeon, "it recalls the old saying, doesn't it? 'When the devil was ill, the devil a monk would be—when the devil was well, the devil a monk was he!' This dear old human nature of ours is pretty much the same all the world over. I haven't a particle of doubt but that if his house should get on fire tonight, or thieves should rob him, or any disaster overtake him, that old juggler would be down on his knees before that very same idol whose ears he so vigorously just now boxed in our presence. 'China is China' we say, but I can tell you that if the Chinese weren't very human under all these native disguises, I wouldn't be here, that's all."

They were interrupted just at this point in the conversation by two French policemen, who were rushing across the street to stop an incident fight among the wheelbarrow coolies at the market wharf. There was the usual amount of shrieking and yelling and the throwing of sand at each other from a convenient neighboring heap and the hurrying of all kinds of curses back and forth until the air was a rich Chinese blue, but in actual blows or personal injuries. The two officers quickly picked out the ringleaders and seized them by the ears, dragged them off to the nearest station and the crowd melted away as rapidly as it had gathered.

Just as they crossed the canal into the British Concession they saw standing there Dr. Cortelyou, the American Consul, and Inspector Gubbins of the police. "Good morning, gentlemen," said the former. "I want you to meet the Chief of our 'guardians of the peace,' as we call them at home—though I believe our friend Dr. Upham already has the pleasure. He is just looking across into the French Settlement and watching the disturbance. The Inspector here tells me that it's a part of the barrow-coolies' trouble that has been threatening for some time and may break out into serious proportions at any moment, though so far the authorities on this side seem to have things under the good control. Isn't that so, Mr. Gubbins?"

"Yes," answered the officer. "I am thankful to say it hasn't come to any general row yet, though we have had several beginnings down at Jardine's and the Japanese wharves that might have proved serious if we hadn't nipped them in time. You never can tell, however, what these things may grow to, especially around the native holidays when they lay off work and take to drinking sam-shu."

"What is the trouble?" asked Dr. Forbes. "Is this a 'strike' as we call it at home, for higher wages—or just what is their grievance?" "Well, sir, it's partly the same and partly different. They're all greatly upset because the authorities are charging them ten cents more for their licenses than they did last year."

"What! You don't mean to say that they would threaten to start a riot for the small sum of ten Chinese cents? Why, that's only about a nickel of our American money."

"Yes, I know, sir, it certainly seems ridiculous, small, but you must remember that the wages of the coolies are ridiculously small, also. As my deputy Captain Brownlow says, 'Brass cash to them is dollars to us, and they can live on what any white man would

starve on.' Then, again, they're awful sticklers for a fixed custom. They don't like to change and when you once give them a settled figure for anything, why it's almost impossible to alter it. As my old house-boy says, 'Chinese man no likes Melican man all time too much change. S'pose he catches one piece, more better he stopes long time at side, more better look see. All time dat change p'idgein too muchse bobby.'"

"Ah, I see, part of the old conservatism of the East and the general disinclination to change, eh?"

"That's it, sir. It's just like that little sampan that you see yonder sculling that native passenger across the river. My native officers tell me that the price is just the same that it was five hundred years ago—they might just as well have said a thousand—and if they attempted to raise it even one small cash, there'd be such a protest and a row that the sampan-man's life wouldn't be worth living. But the real grievance just now, sir, is all over this threatening on the part of the Municipal Council to compel them to grease the axles of their barrows and stop this everlasting squeaking, that is so annoying to the Europeans."

"But that seems to me even more petty than their row over the few extra cents for the license and then, I can't understand why the opinion of a few wheelbarrow coolies should be so important a matter, either one way or the other. We wouldn't think anything of it at home."

"Quite true, sir," added the Inspector, as he turned to enter his pony-trap

which was waiting at the curb for him, "but we're not at home now and you must remember that we have practically no trucks or drays here and that we are dependent on these thousands of barrow-coolies to handle all the freight that passes in and out of Shanghai, so you see it's a serious question, sir. We are practically in their hands and they can do us thousands of pounds of damage if once they make up their minds to it."

His Excellency, the British Minister at Peking, was just bidding his colleague from France good-night, after a friendly rubber at the Club, when the latter said, "By the way, anything further from that anticipated trouble at Shanghai? I have word from our Consul General that they are beginning to feel a little uneasy in the French Concession and some of the ladies are so nervous that they are talking of sleeping aboard the warship, and so the captain has sent a marine guard ashore to re-assure them."

"I don't want to be unkind to burglars because it is a dangerous trade, and I don't want to make money at it, but sometimes day am weary independent. The burglar who got in my house one time stole a ten-dollar bill, an' he had the cheek to come back next day, an' want me to change it for two fives. I had to hurt his feelings."

"I am eighty years ole, an' I figger dat I has spent 'bout forty years tryin' to find out whether de whale swallowed Jonah, or Jonez swallered de whale. I wouldn't have done me any good to find out, but sich am de obstinacy ob mankind."

"My naybur, on de left, don't clean de snow off de sidewalk. I don't clean any, an' dar' fo' we has all got to wade up to our knees. How nice it would be if our two naybors would clean their walks an' mine, too."

"My dawg used to sit up an' howl at de moon. I frew a brick at him an' knocked him ober an' he has not howled since. I want my dawg to know de astronomy, but I don't want him to howl."

"On the contrary, it will raise us in their estimation far higher than we realize. Am I not right, gentlemen?" (turning to the American missionaries). "As old residents in China, Your Excellency, we can assure you that the Bishop is absolutely correct," they answered in one voice, and then turned to the Minister.

"And who is the one person among the Chinese to whom you would entrust this delicate mission?" inquired the Minister. The Bishop thought for a moment or two and then conferred with his colleagues. "The first and the very best person that we can think of," he answered, "is Mr. Wang Foo of Hong Kong. He knows his own people and our people probably better than anyone on the coast and his standing is such as to secure him instant respect. They will listen to him quicker than to anyone else, and he seems to have an almost magical power over them."

"He is a Christian, I suppose?" "No, Your Excellency, he is a devout Confucianist of the highest type, and that is a reason why he has such a pleasure in commending him to you."

The result of the above conference was a telegram sent that very night from the Legation to the Consul in Shanghai, instructing them to confer immediately with Wang Foo as the best means of adjusting the threatened revolt of the wheelbarrow coolies.

"You must remember, sir," said the British Consul, who had just joined Inspector Gubbins and himself at Headquarters in Shanghai, a few days after his arrival from Hong Kong, "that this matter of their greasing the axles of the barrows is not only a question of the expenditure of a few cash for the lard."

"Oh, I see," interrupted the Consul. "It's a matter of their religion, like the greasing of the cartridges that started the mutiny in India, isn't it?" "No, not at all, in this particular case it doesn't happen to go against a religious prejudice as it did in that," answered Wang Foo; "it's a matter of the white man coming and taking away from the Chinese their own property, which has been their's for ages."

"Why, what consolation can they possibly find in that awful 'squeak,' which racks the nerves of every European in the Settlement?" asked the Inspector. "That 'squeak,' as you call it," answered Wang Foo with a smile, "is to his ears the sweetest music in the world. It is the cheery voice of a bird which sings to him as he wheels along and lights both his heart and his burden. You take it away and you make his life just so much drearier and his load, which he bears so bravely, as it is just so much harder for him to lift and push along."

"Is that really what they believe?" asked the Consul. "Certainly, sir. Why, haven't you ever noticed the farmer when he goes out to plough his little field here? He takes his little kite with him and puts it up in the air and fastens a string to its tail, and then as he ploughs it sings and whistles to him and cheers him on with its bird-like note."

"Why, yes, I've often noticed the kite, but never heard the music," smiled the Consul. "Perhaps that's because your English ear is not attuned to their harmonies, sir, or discords, as my friend, Gubbins, would call them, I suppose."

"And do you mean to tell me that all their hard feeling toward us is just on account of that little thing?" "Little to you, sir, but not to them. And there is just the difference. Why should the white man for whom the coolie toils and labors day in and day out begrudge him the little cheer of his own song? That is the way he looks at it, gentlemen, and that is what he resents. Why do you make his burden heavier than it is? Do you not see the point?"

"And so you think they will refuse to obey the order if we try to enforce it?" asked the Inspector. Wang Foo looked thoughtful and serious. After a moment he spoke. "They may, if they can secure concert action. It may eventually come to a serious race riot unless it is handled very judiciously and that in the end means bloodshed, which we all should so bitterly regret. You may carry your point by force of arms, but what is the use? You have antagonized the most patient and faithful set of laborers in the world and stirred up a bitter race prejudice which it will take years to live down. Is it worth it? Gentlemen, it is not!"

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home, to whom trade is first and last and always."

"What do you suggest, then?" inquired the Minister, who had hardly given a thought to this side of the question, but who knew in his innermost heart that this might seriously affect the permanency of his position when the facts would be eventually brought up in Parliament. "I suggest that we use every effort in our power to right this grievance, if it is a grievance, and to adjust the matter by a just and equitable compromise. I believe this can be done and thousands of tails of damage avoided without the crippling of trade or the shedding of unnecessary blood."

"And just how will you do this?" "We Europeans cannot do it alone. We must call in to our aid the very best and wisest of the Chinese, assuring them of our honesty and allowing them to suggest the way that will best appeal to the native mind."

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"Judith, be calm," I sez. "It may be robbers, but ober to be sure, two dollars, an' I ain't got even two cents to loan. Don't you better bunt sich trifles."

"On the contrary, it will raise us in their estimation far higher than we realize. Am I not right, gentlemen?" (turning to the American missionaries). "As old residents in China, Your Excellency, we can assure you that the Bishop is absolutely correct," they answered in one voice, and then turned to the Minister.

"And who is the one person among the Chinese to whom you would entrust this delicate mission?" inquired the Minister. The Bishop thought for a moment or two and then conferred with his colleagues. "The first and the very best person that we can think of," he answered, "is Mr. Wang Foo of Hong Kong. He knows his own people and our people probably better than anyone on the coast and his standing is such as to secure him instant respect. They will listen to him quicker than to anyone else, and he seems to have an almost magical power over them."

"He is a Christian, I suppose?" "No, Your Excellency, he is a devout Confucianist of the highest type, and that is a reason why he has such a pleasure in commending him to you."

The result of the above conference was a telegram sent that very night from the Legation to the Consul in Shanghai, instructing them to confer immediately with Wang Foo as the best means of adjusting the threatened revolt of the wheelbarrow coolies.

"You must remember, sir," said the British Consul, who had just joined Inspector Gubbins and himself at Headquarters in Shanghai, a few days after his arrival from Hong Kong, "that this matter of their greasing the axles of the barrows is not only a question of the expenditure of a few cash for the lard."

"Oh, I see," interrupted the Consul. "It's a matter of their religion, like the greasing of the cartridges that started the mutiny in India, isn't it?" "No, not at all, in this particular case it doesn't happen to go against a religious prejudice as it did in that," answered Wang Foo; "it's a matter of the white man coming and taking away from the Chinese their own property, which has been their's for ages."

"Why, what consolation can they possibly find in that awful 'squeak,' which racks the nerves of every European in the Settlement?" asked the Inspector. "That 'squeak,' as you call it," answered Wang Foo with a smile, "is to his ears the sweetest music in the world. It is the cheery voice of a bird which sings to him as he wheels along and lights both his heart and his burden. You take it away and you make his life just so much drearier and his load, which he bears so bravely, as it is just so much harder for him to lift and push along."

"Is that really what they believe?" asked the Consul. "Certainly, sir. Why, haven't you ever noticed the farmer when he goes out to plough his little field here? He takes his little kite with him and puts it up in the air and fastens a string to its tail, and then as he ploughs it sings and whistles to him and cheers him on with its bird-like note."

"Why, yes, I've often noticed the kite, but never heard the music," smiled the Consul. "Perhaps that's because your English ear is not attuned to their harmonies, sir, or discords, as my friend, Gubbins, would call them, I suppose."